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International Application No. } PCT/IB00/00218  
Demande internationale n° }

International Filing Date } 01 March 2000  
Date du dépôt international } (01.03.00)

Geneva/Genève,  
03 January 2001  
(03.01.01)

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The undersigned requests that the present international application be processed according to the Patent Cooperation Treaty.

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PCT / IB 00 / 00218

International Application No.

01 MARCH 2000 (01.03.00)

International Filing Date

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF WIPO

PCT International Application

Name of receiving Office and "PCT International Application"

Applicant's or agent's file reference  
(if desired) (12 characters maximum)

02886PC1

Box No. I TITLE OF INVENTION Intrabodies with defined framework that is  
stable in a reducing environment and applications thereof

Box No. II APPLICANT

Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full official designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country of the address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no State of residence is indicated below.)

ESBATECH AG  
Winterthurerstrasse 190  
CH-8057 Zürich  
Switzerland

This person is also inventor.

Telephone No.

Faxsimile No.

Teleprinter No.

State (that is, country) of nationality:

CH

State (that is, country) of residence:

CH

This person is applicant  all designated States  all designated States except the United States of America  the United States of America only  the States indicated in the Supplemental Box

Box No. III FURTHER APPLICANT(S) AND/OR (FURTHER) INVENTOR(S)

Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full official designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country of the address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no State of residence is indicated below.)

AUF DER MAUR Adrian  
Wehntalerstrasse 1  
CH-8057 Zürich  
Switzerland

This person is:

applicant only

applicant and inventor

inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)

State (that is, country) of nationality:

CH

State (that is, country) of residence:

CH

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Further applicants and/or (further) inventors are indicated on a continuation sheet.

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The person identified below is hereby/has been appointed to act on behalf of the applicant(s) before the competent International Authorities as:  agent  common representative

Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full official designation. The address must include postal code and name of country.)

E. Blum & Co.  
Vorderberg 11  
CH-8044 Zürich  
Switzerland

Telephone No.

01/261 54 54

Faxsimile No.

01/251 67 17

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Address for correspondence: Mark this check-box where no agent or common representative is/has been appointed and the space above is used instead to indicate a special address to which correspondence should be sent.

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REQUEST

The undersigned requests that the present international application be processed according to the Patent Cooperation Treaty.

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PCT / IB 00 / 00218	
International Application No.	
01 MARCH 2000 (01.03.00)	
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INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF WIPO	
PCT International Application	
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Applicant's or agent's file reference (if desired) (12 characters maximum)	
02886PC1	

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**Box No. II APPLICANT**

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This person is also inventor.

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Facsimile No.

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**State (that is, country) of nationality:** CH **State (that is, country) of residence:** CH

This person is applicant for the purposes of:  all designated States  all designated States except the United States of America  the United States of America only  the States indicated in the Supplemental Box

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Wehntalerstrasse 1  
CH-8057 Zürich  
Switzerland

This person is:

applicant only

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Form PCT/RO/101 (first sheet) (July 1998; reprint January 2000)

See Notes to the request form

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BARBERIS Alcide  
Allenmoosstrasse 64  
CH-8057 Zürich  
Switzerland

This person is:

applicant only  
 applicant and inventor  
 inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)

State (that is, country) of nationality:

CH

State (that is, country) of residence:

CH

This person is applicant for the purposes of:  all designated States  all designated States except the United States of America  the United States of America only  the States indicated in the Supplemental Box

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ESCHER Dominik  
Rütistrasse 58  
CH-8032 Zürich  
Switzerland

This person is:

applicant only  
 applicant and inventor  
 inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)

State (that is, country) of nationality:

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State (that is, country) of residence:

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 applicant and inventor  
 inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)

State (that is, country) of nationality:

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## Box No.V DESIGNATION OF STATES

The following designations are hereby made under Rule 4.9(a) (mark the applicable check-boxes; at least one must be marked):

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EA Eurasian Patent: AM Armenia, AZ Azerbaijan, BY Belarus, KG Kyrgyzstan, KZ Kazakhstan, MD Republic of Moldova, RU Russian Federation, TJ Tajikistan, TM Turkmenistan, and any other State which is a Contracting State of the Eurasian Patent Convention and of the PCT

EP European Patent: AT Austria, BE Belgium, CH and LI Switzerland and Liechtenstein, CY Cyprus, DE Germany, DK Denmark, ES Spain, FI Finland, FR France, GB United Kingdom, GR Greece, IE Ireland, IT Italy, LU Luxembourg, MC Monaco, NL Netherlands, PT Portugal, SE Sweden, and any other State which is a Contracting State of the European Patent Convention and of the PCT

OA OAPI Patent: BF Burkina Faso, BJ Benin, CF Central African Republic, CG Congo, CI Côte d'Ivoire, CM Cameroon, GA Gabon, GN Guinea, GW Guinea-Bissau, ML Mali, MR Mauritania, NE Niger, SN Senegal, TD Chad, TG Togo, and any other State which is a member State of OAPI and a Contracting State of the PCT (if other kind of protection or treatment desired, specify on dotted line)

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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AU Australia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LV Latvia
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA Bosnia and Herzegovina	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MD Republic of Moldova
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BB Barbados	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MG Madagascar
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BG Bulgaria	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MK The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BR Brazil	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MN Mongolia
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ID Indonesia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UG Uganda
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KP Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Check-boxes reserved for designating States which have become party to the PCT after issuance of this sheet:
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## Box No.V DESIGNATION OF STATES

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OA OAPI Patent: BF Burkina Faso, BJ Benin, CF Central African Republic, CG Congo, CI Côte d'Ivoire, CM Cameroon, GA Gabon, GN Guinea, GW Guinea-Bissau, ML Mali, MR Mauritania, NE Niger, SN Senegal, TD Chad, TG Togo, and any other State which is a member State of OAPI and a Contracting State of the PCT (if other kind of protection or treatment desired, specify on dotted line)

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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GE Georgia	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GH Ghana	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GM Gambia	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HR Croatia	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HU Hungary	
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> JP Japan	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KE Kenya	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KG Kyrgyzstan	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KP Democratic People's Republic of Korea	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KR Republic of Korea	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KZ Kazakhstan	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LC Saint Lucia	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LK Sri Lanka	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UZ Uzbekistan	
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Box No. VI PRIORITY CLAIM		<input type="checkbox"/> Further priority claims are indicated in the Supplemental Box.		
Filing date of earlier application (day/month/year)	Number of earlier application	Where earlier application is:		
		national application: country	regional application: regional Office	international application: receiving Office
item (1) (28/12/99) 28.December 1999	PCT/IB99/02054			IB
item (2)				
item (3)				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The receiving Office is requested to prepare and transmit to the International Bureau a certified copy of the earlier application(s) (only if the earlier application was filed with the Office which for the purposes of the present international application is the receiving Office) identified above as item(s): (1) • Where the earlier application is an ARIPO application, it is mandatory to indicate in the Supplemental Box at least one country party to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property for which that earlier application was filed (Rule 4.10(b)(ii)). See Supplemental Box.				
Box No. VII INTERNATIONAL SEARCHING AUTHORITY				
Choice of International Searching Authority (ISA) (if two or more International Searching Authorities are competent to carry out the international search, indicate the Authority chosen; the two-letter code may be used): ISA / EP	Request to use results of earlier search; reference to that search (if an earlier search has been carried out by or requested from the International Searching Authority): Date (day/month/year)      Number      Country (or regional Office)			
Box No. VIII CHECK LIST: LANGUAGE OF FILING				
This international application contains the following number of sheets:  request : 3 description (excluding sequence listing part) : 34 claims : 5 abstract : 1 drawings : 7 sequence listing part of description : 3  Total number of sheets : 53	This international application is accompanied by the item(s) marked below:  1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fee calculation sheet 2. <input type="checkbox"/> separate signed power of attorney 3. <input type="checkbox"/> copy of general power of attorney; reference number, if any: 4. <input type="checkbox"/> statement explaining lack of signature 5. <input type="checkbox"/> priority document(s) identified in Box No. VI as item(s): 6. <input type="checkbox"/> translation of international application into (language): 7. <input type="checkbox"/> separate indications concerning deposited microorganism or other biological material 8. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing in computer readable form 9. <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify):			
Figure of the drawings which should accompany the abstract: 1	Language of filing of the international application: English			
Box No. IX SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT OR AGENT				
Next to each signature, indicate the name of the person signing and the capacity in which the person signs (if such capacity is not obvious from reading the request).				
E. Blum & Co. i.v. 		Zurich, 29 February 2000 rw		
Paul Ronchi				
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1. Date of actual receipt of the purported international application: 01 MARCH 2000		(01.03.00)		2. Drawings: <input type="checkbox"/> received: <input type="checkbox"/> not received:
3. Corrected date of actual receipt due to later but timely received papers or drawings completing the purported international application:				
4. Date of timely receipt of the required corrections under PCT Article 11(2):				
5. International Searching Authority (if two or more are competent): ISA / EP		6. <input type="checkbox"/> Transmittal of search copy delayed until search fee is paid.		
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Sheet No. 6.34

## Box No. VI PRIORITY CLAIM

 Further priority claims are indicated in the Supplemental Box.

Filing date of earlier application (day/month/year)	Number of earlier application	Where earlier application is:		
		national application: country	regional application: regional Office	international application: receiving Office
item (1) (28/12/99) 28. December 1999	PCT/IB99/02054			IB
item (2)				
item (3)				

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## Box No. VII INTERNATIONAL SEARCHING AUTHORITY

Choice of International Searching Authority (ISA) (if two or more International Searching Authorities are competent to carry out the international search, indicate the Authority chosen; the two-letter code may be used):	Request to use results of earlier search; reference to that search (if an earlier search has been carried out by or requested from the International Searching Authority):		
ISA / EP	Date (day/month/year)	Number	Country (or regional Office)

## Box No. VIII CHECK LIST; LANGUAGE OF FILING

This international application contains the following number of sheets:	This international application is accompanied by the item(s) marked below:		
request : 34	1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fee calculation sheet		
description (excluding sequence listing part) : 34	2. <input type="checkbox"/> separate signed power of attorney		
claims : 5	3. <input type="checkbox"/> copy of general power of attorney; reference number, if any:		
abstract : 1	4. <input type="checkbox"/> statement explaining lack of signature		
drawings : 7	5. <input type="checkbox"/> priority document(s) identified in Box No. VI as item(s):		
sequence listing part of description : 3	6. <input type="checkbox"/> translation of international application into (language):		
Total number of sheets : 58	7. <input type="checkbox"/> separate indications concerning deposited microorganism or other biological material		
	8. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing in computer readable form		
	9. <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify):		

Figure of the drawings which should accompany the abstract: 1 Language of filing of the international application: English

## Box No. IX SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT OR AGENT

Next to each signature, indicate the name of the person signing and the capacity in which the person signs (if such capacity is not obvious from reading the request).

E. Blum &amp; Co.

i.v.

Zurich, 29 February 2000 rw

Paul Ronchi

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1. Date of actual receipt of the purported international application:	01 MARCH 2000 (01.03.00)	2. Drawings:
3. Corrected date of actual receipt due to later but timely received papers or drawings completing the purported international application:		<input type="checkbox"/> received:
4. Date of timely receipt of the required corrections under PCT Article 1(2):		<input type="checkbox"/> not received:
5. International Searching Authority (if two or more are competent): ISA /	6. <input type="checkbox"/> Transmittal of search copy delayed until search fee is paid.	

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Intrabodies with defined framework that is  
stable in a reducing environment and applications thereof

Technical Field

5 The present invention concerns single chain fusions of variable regions of heavy and light chains of an antibody (scFv), in particular such scFv expressed within a cell (intrabodies) with a defined, stable, framework.

10

Background Art

Antibodies are preferred tools for biochemical and molecular biology research, diagnostics and medical applications due to their high affinity and specificity to the antigen and due to their relatively high stability in vitro and in vivo. Antibodies are made of two heavy and two light chains, which contain the variable regions at their N-termini and which are linked by disulfide bridges. Single chain antibodies have been engineered by linking fragments of the variable heavy and light chain regions (scFv). Each variable domain contains three complementary determining regions (CDR) embedded in a framework. These CDRs are responsible for the interaction with the antigen. Each variable heavy and light region contains an intradomain disulfide bridge, which was reported to be critical for stability of the single chain antibody (Biocca et al., 1995; Derman et al., 1993).

30 The most commonly used technique to identify single chain antibodies which bind specific epitopes is by phage display and variations thereof (for review see Hoogenboom et al., 1998). This screening system has major advantages over conventional techniques like immunization or hybridoma technique, namely that it can uncover monoclonal single chain antibodies within a relatively short time.

Single chain antibodies expressed within the cell (e.g. cytoplasm or nucleus) are called intrabodies. Due to the reducing environment within the cell, disulfide bridges, believed to be critical for antibody stability, are not formed. Thus, it was initially believed that applications of intrabodies are not suitable. But several cases are described showing the feasibility of intrabodies (Beerli et al., 1994; Biocca et al., 1994; Duan et al., 1994; Gargano and Cattaneo, 1997; Greenman et al., 1996; Martineau et al., 1998; Mhashilkar et al., 1995; Tavladoraki et al., 1993). In these cases, intrabodies work by e.g. blocking the cytoplasmic antigen and therefore inhibiting its biological activity.

Up to now, intrabodies were most of the time derived from monoclonal antibodies which were first selected with classical techniques (e.g. phage display) and subsequently tested for their biological activity as intrabodies within the cell (Visintin et al., 1999). Although successful intrabodies are described (see above), it is today completely unpredictable whether such an intrabody is functional within the cell (for reviews see Cattaneo, 1998; Cattaneo and Biocca, 1999). The reasons are most probably the different environments: Phage display and other classical techniques are performed under oxidizing conditions, therefore disulfide bridges are formed, whereas intrabodies must function in reducing conditions. This reducing environment can lead to insufficient solubility of the intrabody and hence they form non-functional aggregates. The solubility of an intrabody can be modified by either changes in the framework (Knappik and Pluckthun, 1995) or the CDRs (Kipriyanov et al., 1997; Ulrich et al., 1995).

However, the hitherto known systems are limited with regard to their application to detect intracellular targets. Therefore, it is a growing need to have a reliable technology and system to directly screen for intrabodies specific for an antigen.

In WO 99/36569, Wittrup et al. describe a method to display proteins and scFv on the cell wall of yeast by using a yeast endogenous protein fragment derived from Aga2p for localization on the cell wall. Libraries of proteins and scFv can be screened interacting with other proteins. Other related systems are described in EP 0 407 259 (Boquet et al., 1991). These systems are comparable to the phage display screening where the protein or peptide library is also presented on the surface. 5 However, these techniques cannot be used for intracellular screenings to identify intrabodies. 10

The patent document JP 11000174 (Kyoko et al., 1999) describes the use of yeast *Pichia pastoris* for high level expression and secretion of antibody Fab fragments. This yeast is famous for its high secretion level and is therefore preferably used for this application. 15 The secreted antibody can be harvested by purification of the supernatant. Furthermore, in EP 0 590 067, WO92/22324, JP 060 30 778, US 569 8435, US 559 5889, JP 20 10313876 yeast is used for production of secreted proteins or antibodies. EP 0 698 097 and WO 94/25591 disclose application of the production and secretion of only the heavy chain or fragments thereof for further applications. JP 0 902 0798; JP 051 05700; and JP 050 97704 describe methods of yeast secretion to obtain hepatitis 25 vaccine when administered to the human body or to organisms in general.

It is also already known from WO 99/28502 to use yeast for screenings of single chain antibodies. Said 30 application discloses to use a DNA construct library for a single chain monoclonal antibody fusion reagent. This scFv library (therein termed sFv library) is subsequently used for screenings. However, it has now been found that the stability and solubility of intrabodies can vary dramatically 35 due to the use of a non specified framework. Furthermore, it could be shown that a direct correlation exists between the in vivo performance and the in vitro

stability and solubility. Therefore, the use of mRNA derived libraries of different scFv fragments is limited in view of the possibility to identify CDR which have a high affinity to the antigen because, although the CDRs would 5 in principle show the required high affinity to the antigen, the corresponding framework is not soluble enough and thus aggregates, making it impossible to select for this monoclonal scFv. Thus, there is still a need for improved antibodies, or intrabodies, respectively.

10 The growing applications of scFv directed against intracellular targets raise the need for reliable screening systems for intrabodies. Cytoplasmatic targets of scFv are the most demanding application due to the instability of the scFv under reducing conditions and the 15 unpredictability of the antibody stability. This stability and also solubility problem can be solved by using defined frameworks, optimized for intracellular application.

20 Disclosure of the Invention

Hence, it is a general object of the present invention to provide methods for the isolation of a scFv or intrabody with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment.

25 A further object of the present invention is such a scFv or intrabody with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment.

Another object of the present invention is a scFv or intrabody with defined framework that is stable 30 and soluble in reducing environment that is modified to provide unique restriction sites in the CDR/framework-connecting regions.

Another object of the present invention is a library of scFvs or intrabodies with defined framework 35 that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, and randomly or definedly variated CDRs.

Another object of the present invention is a method for screening for antigen binding CDRs using such scFvs or intrabodies with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, and varied CDRs, 5 or a library of such scFvs or intrabodies.

Another object of the present invention is a method for screening for further antigens using such scFv or intrabodies or library, respectively.

The intrabodies of the present invention can 10 furthermore be used as agent in therapy, diagnosis or prevention of diseases and several applications in plants, such as functional knock out of a specific protein activity. The intrabodies can be used as such or as DNA encoding such scFv.

15 In the scope of the present text, the terms scFv and intrabody are largely used as synonyms, however, it has to be understood that, while the stability and solubility of the intrabodies (scFv) with defined framework of the present invention in reducing environment, 20 e.g. within a cell, is necessary for the present invention, the application of such intrabodies (scFv) etc. is not restricted to applications within a cell.

25 By only introducing amino acid changes within the CDRs, such a framework according to the present invention greatly increases the possibility to identify monoclonal antibodies showing the desired biological function of specific antigen recognition. Such changes in the CDRs of the scFv can be performed as random changes without changing the defined framework, suitable for the 30 cytoplasmatic application of intrabodies.

In order to perform screenings of monoclonal 35 single chain antibodies within the cell, one has to use a framework which is adapted to the redox environment of the cytoplasm. Therefore a framework has to be stable and soluble enough even in the absence of disulfide bridge.

Most of the scFv, however, are known not to fold into the proper structure under reducing conditions or in the ab-

sence of the cysteine, responsible for the formation of intradomain disulfide bridges. Thus, in the scope of the present invention several frameworks containing identical CDRs have been compared and dramatic differences in the 5 in vivo performance have been observed. By the inventive method the best performing framework containing the defined CDRs for antigen recognition can be selected. This method is performed in that an intrabody to a known antigen is used as starting material. The linker used to connect the variable regions of heavy and light chain is not critical. It must, however, provide sufficient solubility and flexibility to ensure suitable contact and folding for an interaction between CDRs and antigen. Suitable linkers have a typical length of about 5-60 amino acids, 10 usual regular series of glycine and in order to enhance 15 solubility 1 to 3 serine.

Such an inventive method for the isolation of an scFv with defined framework that is stable and soluble 20 in a reducing environment is defined by the following steps:

- a) a scFv library with varied frameworks and constant CDRs is generated by mutation of at least one framework encoding region of DNA sequence of a scFv to a 25 known antigen and by introduction of such mutations into suitable expression vectors,
- b) host cells able to express a specific known antigen and only surviving in the presence of antigen-scFv-interaction are transformed with said scFv library,
- c) the thus transformed host cells are cultivated under conditions suitable to express the antigen and the scFv and allowing cell survival only in the presence of antigen-scFv-interaction,
- d) the scFv expressed in surviving cells and having a defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment is isolated.

In a preferred embodiment the host cell is an eukaryotic cell, in particular a yeast cell.

By the above described method a scFv with defined framework is obtainable. Such framework is also an 5 object of the present invention. Such a framework can be modified to comprise specific restriction sites allowing the selective exchanging of at least one CDR. Preferably said restriction sites are located within the framework flanking a CDR.

10 The invention furthermore provides a method for the generation of a scFv encoding DNA with a framework suitable for selective alterations in the CDR region, wherein specific restriction sites are introduced into the sequence of a defined, stable and soluble scFv 15 encoding DNA by means of site directed mutagenesis whereby said restriction sites are preferably located within the framework and whereby the substitution of the nucleotides to generate the restriction site does not affect the amino acid sequence.

20 An improved scFv with defined framework that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment can also be obtained by a method that is also an object of the present invention, wherein at least two variations of at least two different frameworks that are stable and soluble 25 in a reducing environment, preferably frameworks of the present invention are combined to produce a scFv with defined framework.

30 A scFv obtainable by the above described method is also an object of the present invention. In such framework it is preferred that at least one of the variations is preceding the CDR1 of the variable light chain and/or at least one of the variations is located between CDR2 and CDR3 of the variable heavy chain.

35 In a much preferred embodiment the scFv of the present invention comprises at least 2 variations preceding CDR1 of the variable light chain and at least 2, preferably at least 4 variations located between CDR2

and CDR3 of the variable heavy chain, in particular a scFv comprising the framework defined in SEQ ID NO 1.

In order to specifically randomize the CDRs in such framework, silent changes, still coding for the same 5 amino acid sequences but using different codons, can be introduced which lead to the generation of unique restriction sites (see also above). While the restriction sites can be located anywhere in the CDR/framework-connecting regions, it is preferred if they are located 10 in the framework flanking each individual CDR. By this, each individual CDR can be replaced by introducing random or defined sequences. This allows to select for novel CDR in the intrabody showing a high affinity to the antigen.

When additional sequences, like localization 15 signals or activation domains are introduced into a non-defined framework, stemming from a scFv library, it is possible that due to this modifications, the biological activity - even if hitherto present - is lost, e.g. the scFv gets insoluble. Therefore it is of advantage to use 20 a defined framework of the present invention to a known antigen and subsequently introduce such modifications at different locations in the intrabody (N- and C-terminal or within the coding sequence of the scFv) and select for the maintenance of the original function. WO 99/28502 de- 25 scribes several possibilities to introduce a localization signal. The activation domain used for interaction screenings to an antigen has been described in WO 99/98502 to be introduced at the C-terminus of the scFv library. It has now been found that by the method of the 30 present invention also frameworks can be selected which accept additional sequences at different locations, e.g. the activation domain at the N-terminus, which still perform similar to their scFv counterparts, having no activation domain, in the antagonistic function. Therefore, 35 e.g. in the framework further described in the following examples, introducing the activation domain N-terminal does not impair the antibody function.

Starting from an intrabody of the present invention with a defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, scFv or intrabodies, respectively, containing CDR libraries can be generated.

5 A suitable method for the generation of a CDR library with a defined framework, that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment is a method of the present invention, wherein DNA sequences encoding a scFv of the present invention are digested to replace at least  
10 one CDR per sequence by a modified CDR. Preferably the modified CDR is generated by random changes. By such method a library of intrabodies with at least one randomized CDR and defined framework that is stable and soluble under reductive conditions can be generated.

15 The intrabodies of the present invention containing CDR libraries can be used to screen and select for clones having a high affinity to the antigen. Such a method for screening for CDRs interacting with a specific antigen is also an object of the present invention and  
20 comprises host cells transformed with a nucleic acid sequence, in particular a DNA sequence, encoding a known antigen which are further transformed with a randomized CDR library with defined framework that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment, whereby the antigen  
25 and/or the scFv are linked to a marker system or part of a marker system thus that the cell cultured under selective conditions only survives in the presence of antigen/scFv-interaction, that thus transformed cells are cultivated under selective conditions, and that surviving  
30 cells are cultured and the intrabodies harvested.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention the framework is a framework of the present invention and the cell is an eukaryotic cell, in particular a yeast cell.

35 In a much preferred embodiment of the present invention the DNA sequence encoding the antigen and the DNA sequence encoding the scFv both encode chimeric mole-

cules with the antigen or scFv, respectively, both linked to part of a transcription activating system linked to a survival allowing marker, more preferably the antigen is fused to a DNA binding domain and the scFv is fused to a transcriptional activator domain or the antigen is fused to a transcriptional activator domain and the scFv is fused to a DNA binding domain.

— — — — — The intrabodies of the present invention containing CDR libraries can be used to screen and select for clones having a high affinity to the antigen. This can either be achieved by blocking the intracellularly located antigen in its biological function or by assaying for direct interaction of the CDRs embedded in the defined framework to the antigen. Direct interaction can, preferably, be monitored by a transcriptional readout, preferably by the expression of the HIS3 gene. Adding 3-aminotriazol (3AT) to the medium, allows to select for higher affinity of the CDRs to the antigen under said predetermined conditions. Host cells which are able to express a specific known antigen only survive in the presence of antigen-scFv-interaction under said conditions, preferably in the presence of sufficiently strong antigen-scFv interaction. The term sufficiently strong as used herein is defined as protein-protein interactions having a  $K_D$ , measured by BIACore, which is  $> 1 \times 10^{-6}$  M, preferably a  $K_D > 1 \times 10^{-8}$  M and more preferably a  $K_D > 1 \times 10^{-10}$  M. Such a selection step can further be applied to perform affinity maturation by random or selective changes of amino acids in the CDR (preferably CDR1 and CDR2 of the light and heavy chain) and subsequently select out of this pool for growth on increased 3AT concentration.

As already mentioned above, hitherto known and used scFv libraries stem from the isolation of mRNA from preferably spleen which is known to have a high accumulation of B cells and therefore rearranged antibodies are expressed. Such a library has the drawback that it has been pre-selected (positive and negative selection)

not to react against epitopes present in this organism. This guarantees that only antibodies can mature and be activated which do not start an autoimmune reaction. However, due to this selection steps, not all possible amino acid combinations are present in such a "natural" scFv library. For several in vitro and diagnostic applications, antibodies are required interacting with proteins which are conserved among species. For such proteins or peptides, it might be very difficult to find strong interacting monoclonal antibodies in "natural" scFv libraries due to the pre-selection steps. Furthermore, the frameworks present in such "natural" libraries are not optimized, wherefore insufficient or variable solubility and/or stability, respectively, generates problems. Therefore it is of great advantage to use only CDR random libraries comprising a framework of and/or obtainable with the method of the present invention and, covering some or, preferably, all possible combinations of amino acid sequence in these regions.

In order to further describe the present invention, a stable and soluble intrabody framework with defined complementary determining regions (CDRs) directed against a yeast intracellular transcription factor Gcn4p was selected. This defined framework was used to replace the CDRs by random sequences. These CDR libraries are screened to identify new CDRs which provoke a demanded biological activity (in vivo effect of the CDRs):

a) Molecular interactions which occur naturally within the cell (e.g. in human cells or any other heterologous cells) are reconstituted in a suitable cell, preferably yeast, or yeast endogenous interactions are used. A subsequent screening identifies high affinity CDRs due to the interference of these CDRs with the biological activity of the reconstituted or endogenous molecules. Such an antagonistic CDR could e.g. function by blocking two proteins involved in signal transduction pathways.

b) Agonistic CDRs are selected which induce a demanded biological activity on the reconstituted or endogenous molecules.

The random CDRs embedded in the stable framework can further be used to identify interactions of the CDR with an antigen based on the two-hybrid technique (interaction screenings):

a) It could be shown that the selected framework can be fused to a transcriptional activation domain and still retains its function. This chimeric intrabody is used to select for high affinity CDRs against a given antigen fused to a DNA-binding domain or a transcription factor which possesses DNA-binding activity. Upon interaction of the antigen and the CDRs, the transcriptional activation domain mediates gene expression of a selectable marker gene thus allowing survival of this cell under selective conditions.

b) A reconstituted molecular interaction based on hybrid technique (fusion of one partner to activation domain, the other if necessary to DNA-binding domain) can be blocked by specific, high affinity CDRs.

It was also found that different mutations in the framework but constant CDRs of the intrabody have an effect on its *in vivo* performance by changing the stability and solubility of the intrabody. The framework contributes the major part to the stability and solubility of an intrabody. Nevertheless, certain mutations in the CDRs might also affect solubility and stability of the intrabody. Therefore it might be advantageous to pre-select the random CDRs embedded in a defined framework by a functional quality control (see below).

For the purpose of quality control of a library the invention provides a method for testing/ evaluating a scFv library or any CDR library wherein host cells transformed with a DNA sequence encoding an intrabody directed against a constant region of the library are further transformed with DNA sequences encoding said

library whereby the intrabody and the library are linked to a marker system or part of a marker system thus that the cultured cells under selective conditions only survive in the presence of intrabody-library interaction and 5 that said cells are cultured under selective conditions.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention the DNA sequence encoding the intrabody and the DNA sequence encoding the library both encode chimeric molecules with the intrabody or the library, respectively, 10 both linked to part of a transcription activating system linked to a survival allowing marker, more preferably the intrabody is fused to a DNA binding domain and the library is fused to a transcriptional activator domain or the intrabody is fused to a transcriptional activator domain and the library is fused to a DNA binding domain. 15

In the above described method the library is a scFv library or a CDR library, preferably a library according to the present invention.

20 An scFv with defined framework obtainable by the above method is also an object of the present invention, in particular for the use in a method of the present invention.

The same method can also be applied for the 25 screening of any scFv library to identify soluble and stable frameworks that may e.g. be used as starting material for a scFv or CDR library in particular -libraries of the present invention.

Another object of the present invention is to 30 provide a method for screening for an antigen interacting with an scFv, wherein host cells expressing at least one antigen of interest are transformed with at least one scFv with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, or with a randomized CDR library 35 with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, whereby the antigens and/or the scFvs are linked to a marker system or part of a marker system

thus that the cell cultured under selective conditions only survives in the presence of antigen/scFv-interaction, that thus transformed cells are cultivated under selective conditions, and that surviving cells are 5 cultured and the scFvs harvested.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention the framework is a framework of the present invention and the cell is an eukaryotic cell, in particular a yeast cell.

10 In a much preferred embodiment of the present invention the DNA sequence encoding the antigen and the DNA sequence encoding the scFv both encode chimeric molecules with the antigen or scFv, respectively, both linked to part of a transcription activating system linked to a 15 survival allowing marker, more preferably the antigen is fused to a DNA binding domain and the scFv is fused to a transcriptional activator domain or the antigen is fused to a transcriptional activator domain and the scFv is fused to a DNA binding domain.

20 The invention furthermore provides an scFv with defined framework as therapeutic or diagnostic or prophylactic agent and the use of the scFv with defined framework for intracellular screenings.

25 For all purposes of the present invention eukaryotic cells are preferred, whereby yeast cells are especially preferred due to their specific features including e.g. fast growth, positive selection, growth selection and efficient transformation and selection thereof.

30

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 shows how a quality control of the CDR library may be performed.

35 Figure 2 shows the better in vivo performance of the optimized Gal4 AD-Ω-graft scFv compared to another variant called λ-graft.

Figure 3A shows in vivo performance of dif-

ferent scFv fragments on gene expression of a Gcn4p dependent LacZ reporter gene.

Figure 3B shows in vivo performance of different scFv fragments expressed in yeast, in a two hybrid 5 assay.

Figure 4 shows growth selection in a two hybrid assay of cells expressing different scFv fragments.

Figure 5A shows that the N-terminal fusion of a transcriptional activation domain to a single chain antibody 10 does not sufficiently change the property of this scFv fragment on gene expression of a Gcn4p dependent LacZ reporter

Figure 5B shows that the introduction of two unique restriction site in a single chain antibody does 15 not change the property of this scFv fragment on gene expression of a LacZ reporter.

Figure 6 shows western blot analysis of solubility of different Gcn4p binding scFv fragments expressed in yeast.

20

#### Modes for Carrying out the Invention

##### ***Quality control of the scFv and CDR libraries***

For the purpose of quality control (an intrabody 25 shows sufficient intracellular solubility and stability) of the CDR library or the scFv library, a fusion to an activation domain and a constant region (e.g. a His-tag) is performed. This library is transformed into a host cell, preferably a yeast cell expressing e.g. a known intrabody, fused to a DNA-binding domain (DBD) 30 which binds near a selectable marker gene (Marker gene) and which is directed against a constant region (Constant region) of the CDR or scFv library (see Figure 1). Growth 35 of this host cell is only mediated when the tested intrabody shows the demanded solubility and stability and therefore can sufficiently interact with the DNA-bound

intrabody.

***ScFv fragments cytoplasmically expressed in yeast***

5 Suitable scFv fragments are e.g. the anti-GCN4 wild-type scFv that has originally been obtained by ribosome display from a library constructed from an immunized mouse (Hanes et al., 1998). The antigen was a double proline mutant of the Gcn4p leucine zipper, called 10 7P14P (indicating that positions 7 and 14 of the zipper domain are mutated to Pro residues), which forms a random coil in solution (Leder et al., 1995). The scFv fragment prevents dimerization of the wild-type Gcn4p coiled coil peptide *in vitro* (Berger et al., 1999), as it also binds 15 the wild-type peptide as a monomer in a random coil conformation. The anti-GCN4 scFv fragment referred to as "wild-type" in connection with the present invention has been measured to have a dissociation constant of  $4 \cdot 10^{-11} M$  from the leuzine zipper peptide (Hanes et al., 1998).

20 In the scope of the present invention, several different mutants of this scFv were investigated. Besides the anti-GCN4 wild-type, a destabilized variant of the anti-GCN4 wild-type, which carries the H-R66K mutation [termed anti-GCN4(H-R66K)], served as an example 25 for a Gcn4p binding scFv fragment with essentially identical antigen binding properties, but with slightly decreased *in vitro* stability (see below). The Arg residue at position H-66 (numbering according to Kabat et al., 1991) is far away from the antigen binding pocket and 30 usually forms a double hydrogen bond to Asp H-86. Arg at position H-66 was shown previously to result in higher protein stability than a Lys in the levan binding A48 scFv fragment (Proba et al., 1998; Wörn and Plückthun, 1998a). Moreover, a Val-Ala variant of the anti-GCN4 scFv 35 fragment [termed anti-GCN4(SS<sup>-</sup>)] was tested, where both intradomain disulfides were replaced by Val-Ala pairs (L-C23V, L-C88A, H-C22V, H-C92A). These mutations had been

shown to act slightly stabilizing compared with the reduced dithiol form of the p185HER2 binding 4D5 scFv fragment before, and it had been speculated that they might improve the performance of intrabodies (Wörn and Plückthun, 1998b).

Two additional variants were engineered by grafting (Jones et al., 1986) the anti-GCN4 CDR (complementarity determining region) loops to another framework. As the acceptor framework the so-called "hybrid" scFv was chosen (Wörn and Plückthun, 1999). This acceptor framework is composed of the  $V_L$  domain of the 4D5 scFv fragment and the  $V_H$  domain of the A48<sup>\*\*</sup>(H2) scFv fragment. It had been rationally designed from a series of stabilized domains and stands out for its extraordinary stability, as demonstrated by denaturant induced equilibrium unfolding, and a high expression yield (Wörn and Plückthun, 1999). Two CDR-grafted variants with the anti-GCN4 scFv CDRs and the "hybrid" scFv framework were prepared by total gene synthesis. As the anti-GCN4 wild-type loop donor carried a  $\lambda$  light chain, while the acceptor "hybrid" framework carried a  $\kappa$  light chain, the loop grafting was not straightforward. Therefore, two different variants were designed, one more " $\kappa$ -like" (termed  $\kappa$ -graft), the other more " $\lambda$ -like" (termed  $\lambda$ -graft). These two variants differ only in seven residues in the  $V_H$ - $V_L$  interface region, potentially influencing the orientation of the two domains to each other. The ampicillin-binding scFv fragment AL5 (A. Kreber et al., unpublished) served as a negative control for a scFv fragment not binding Gcn4p.

30

**Anti-GCN4 scFv intrabodies inhibit the trans-activation potential of Gcn4p**

The anti-GCN4 scFv was initially tested for its biological activity expressed from several yeast vectors including *GAL1* and *ADH*-driven promoters. In addition, the nuclear localization signal (NLS) from SV40

large T-antigen was fused N-terminally to the anti-GCN4 scFv. Of the combinations tested, the anti-GCN4 scFv showed the strongest biological effect when expressed from the actin-1 promoter without any NLS using the 5 pESBA-Act expression vector (see Examples) with TRP1 selection marker and 2 $\mu$  origin (data not shown). This vector was subsequently used for all further experiments.

The *in vivo* effect of expressing the different scFv fragments on GCN4 dependent LacZ expression is 10 depicted in Figure 3A. The reporter construct (YAdM2xGCN4-150) contained two Gcn4p binding sites at position -150 relative to the TATA box and was integrated into the yeast genome. Relative  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity (Rel.  $\beta$ -gal. activity) driven by endogenous Gcn4p was arbitrarily set to 100%. AL5 is an ampicillin binding scFv fragment and serves as negative control. Besides the 15 anti-GCN4 wild-type (wt), a destabilized point mutant [anti-GCN4 (H-R66K)], a cysteine-free variant of the anti-GCN4 wild-type [anti-GCN4 (SS<sup>-</sup>)], and two framework stabilized variants of anti-GCN4 ( $\kappa$ -graft and  $\lambda$ -graft) were 20 tested. The stabilized  $\lambda$ -graft was the most active intrabody, whilst the destabilized H-R66K point mutant and the cysteine-free variant of anti-GCN4 showed decreased 25 activity, compared to the anti-GCN4 wild-type. The decreased activity of the  $\kappa$ -graft is believed to be due to its low binding affinity (see Table 1). The destabilized point mutant anti-GCN4 (H-R66K) was less efficient in 30 inhibition of GCN4 dependent reporter gene activity, compared to the wild-type scFv. The pattern of Gcn4p trans- activation inhibition was highly reproducible and was 35 also confirmed when using a different assay method, where  $\beta$ -galactosidase reporter activity was measured after disrupting the cells by glass beads or freeze-thaw cycles for lysis and normalizing the  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity to protein concentration (Escher and Schaffner, 1997) (data not shown).

Table 1

Protein	$K_D$ [M]	measured $\beta$ -galactosidase activity (%)	approximate onset of denaturation ([M])
anti-GCN4.wt	$4.36 \pm 0.09 \cdot 10^{-11}$	$52 \pm 1.38$	1.7
anti-GCN4 (H-R66K)	$4.21 \pm 2.66 \cdot 10^{-11}$	$66 \pm 1.98$	1.4
$\lambda$ -graft	$3.80 \pm 0.76 \cdot 10^{-10}$	$16 \pm 0.50$	2.0
$\kappa$ -graft	$1.57 \pm 0.14 \cdot 10^{-06}$	$79 \pm 2.37$	2.6

5

*The Gal4 AD-scFv fusion proteins perform in a two hybrid assay according to their in vitro stability and in vivo performance.*

10 The successful interaction between the antigen and the complementary determining regions (CDRs) in the two hybrid assay monitoring LacZ expression as a reporter gene is shown in Figure 3B. The reporter strain YDE173 was used. Strain YDE173 was deposited on February 15 11, 2000 with the Deutsche Sammlung von Mikroorganismen und Zellkulturen DSZM, Braunschweig Germany, under the Number DSM 13333. YDE173 was derived from yeast strain JPY5 (Mat $\alpha$  ura3-52 his3 $\Delta$ 200 leu2 $\Delta$ 1 trp1 $\Delta$ 63 lys2 $\Delta$ 385) having integrated at the genomic his3 locus the reporter 20 plasmid pDE200 which contains six LexA binding sites controlling the divergently oriented reporter genes HIS3 and LacZ.

25 The same scFv fragments as used for Fig. 3A, but fused to the transcriptional activation domain of Gal4 were coexpressed together with the GCN4 leucine zipper (aa 245-285) fused C-terminal to LexA, serving as a bait for the two hybrid assay. The unspecific AL5 control scFv fusion construct was unable to interact with the LexA-GCN4 leucin zipper and therefore did not activate the LacZ reporter gene. The Gal4 activation domain fused to the 30

framework stabilized  $\lambda$ -graft variant exhibited the strongest effect as activating intrabody, followed by the anti-GCN4 wild-type, and the destabilized point mutant anti-GCN4 (H-R66K). In contrast the highly stable but 5 weakly binding  $\kappa$ -graft and the cysteine-free anti-GCN4 (SS<sup>-</sup>) caused no significant reporter gene expression in the two hybrid format. The same results were obtained in 10 an X-Gal plate assay (data not shown). In summary, the *in vivo* performance of the different Gal4 AD-scFv fusion 15 variants in activating the LacZ reporter gene in the two hybrid format correlates reciprocally to the inhibition pattern of the Gcn4p dependent LacZ expression (compare Figure 3A with 3B).

15 *Interaction between the antigen and the different scFv's fused to a transcriptional activation domain allows growth selection in a two hybrid assay*

Since the integrated reporter construct contains not only a LacZ reporter gene but also the HIS3 20 gene, it is suitable for growth selection on plates lacking any histidine. Furthermore, by adding different concentration of 3-aminotriazol (3-AT), which is a competitive inhibitor of the HIS3 gene product, it is possible 25 to inhibit (suppress) growth of the yeast cells dependent on the strength of the interaction between bait/antigen and Gal4 AD-scFv.

The experimental procedure leading to the results shown in Figure 4 was as follows: A serial 5-fold dilution, starting with approximately 10'000 yeast cells 30 coexpressing the GCN4 leucine zipper (aa 245-285) fused to LexA and a Gal4-AD scFv fusion protein, were spotted on drop out plates (-Trp/-Leu/-His) containing different concentrations of 3-AT. Growth was monitored after 48h, 72h, and 120h.

35 The lanes in Figure 4 are as follows:

1. Gal4-AD  $\lambda$ -graft, 2. Gal4-AD AL5, 3. Gal4-AD  $\kappa$ -graft, 4. Gal4-AD anti-GCN4 (SS<sup>-</sup>), 5. Gal4-AD anti-

GCN4 wild-type, 6. Gal4-AD Anti-GCN4 (H-R66K), 7. LexA-Gal11 fusion protein serves as positive control, 8. empty vectors.

Growth of the yeast strains coexpressing the bait/antigen (lexA-GCN4 leucine zipper) together with a Gal4 AD-scFv fusions was monitored over five days. As a control on plates lacking 3-AT, no obvious growth difference of the different Gal4 AD-scFv fusion variants was observed. Already 20 mM 3-AT were enough to suppress growth of the cells transformed with the negative control scFv (Gal4 AD-AL5). In correlation with the results monitoring  $\beta$ -galactosidase expression, the Gal4 AD fusions with the  $\kappa$ -graft variant, anti-GCN4 (SS<sup>++</sup>), and anti-GCN4 (H-R66K) did not allow growth in the presence of 20 mM 3-AT. Cells expressing the  $\lambda$ -graft variant as well as the anti-GCN4 wild-type were able to grow in the presence of up to 80 mM 3-AT within 5 days with a clear advantage for the framework stabilized  $\lambda$ -graft over the time. A concentration of 100 mM 3-AT was enough to abolish growth of cells expressing Gal4 AD-anti-GCN4 wild-type. Only after five days, a few appeared on the most concentrated spotting whereas cells expressing the  $\lambda$ -graft Gal4 AD-scFv fusion variant clearly grew.

The N-terminal fusion of an activation domain to the scFv does not interfere with the biological activity of a single chain antibody

A N-terminal fusion of the activation domain to the  $\lambda$ -graft scFv (Gal4-AD  $\lambda$ -graft) was performed and this construct was compared to its counterpart without activation domain. As shown in Figure 5A the Gal4-AD  $\lambda$ -graft and the  $\lambda$ -graft had similar effects in inhibiting the GCN4 dependent LacZ expression. Therefore the Gal4 activation domain does not interfere with the biological activity of the  $\lambda$ -graft intrabody.

Introduction of specific restriction sites

In order to exchange the CDR3  $V_H$  (GLFDY) with a random peptide library, two unique restriction sites (*Bgl*II and *Xho*I) flanking this hypervariable region were introduced by silent mutagenesis. These silent changes 5 did not affect the amino acid sequence of the antibody and therefore did not alter the *in vivo* performance of the  $\lambda$ -graft variant (see Figure 5B).

The importance of the CDR3 hypervariable region (de Wildt et al., 1997; Hemminki et al., 1998) for 10 specific recognition of its antigen (GCN4 leucine zipper) was shown by introducing an additional alanine N-terminal to the CDR3 (AGLFDY) of the variable heavy chain. This  $\lambda$ -graft+Ala variant failed to inhibit expression of a Gcn4p dependent reporter gene in the yeast strain YAdM 2xGCN4- 15 150, and was also unable to activate reporter gene expression in the two hybrid format using the strain YDE173 (data not shown).

**Both graft variants are soluble in yeast cy-  
20 toplasm**

The solubility of the different Gcn4p binding scFv fragments in yeast was tested by Western blot analysis. Only in case of the  $\lambda$ - and  $\kappa$ -graft variants significant amounts of soluble protein could be detected in 25 crude cell extracts (Figure 6).

All other anti-GCN4 scFv fragments appeared to be essentially completely insoluble, with the amount of insoluble scFv slightly increasing with decreasing *in vitro* stability. However, one has to caution that the ex- 30 act ratio of soluble to insoluble protein for the different scFv variants may not necessarily reflect the ratio present *in vivo*. It cannot be excluded that part of the different anti-GCN4 variants might have precipitated during sample preparation, even though we used a gentle cell 35 disruption method, by using the Y-PER<sup>TM</sup> Yeast Protein Extraction Reagent form Pierce.

***Improvement of the framework***

Variations in frameworks preferably isolated by a method according to the present invention can be combined to generate further frameworks that are stable and soluble in a reducing environment. Said resulting frameworks show an enhanced in vivo performance compared to frameworks bearing only one variation. A framework combining six variations is defined in SEQ ID NO:1.

10

**Examples**

Design of CDR-grafted anti-GCN4 scFv fragments

15 ***fragments***

All scFv fragments were in a V<sub>L</sub>-V<sub>H</sub> orientation with a 20-mer linker (GGGGSGGGGGGGGGGGGG) and a C-terminal his<sub>5</sub>-tag.

The scFv fragments expressed in yeast were cloned into the pESBA-Act expression vector. The pESBA-Act vector is a *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* - *E.coli* shuttle vector. It contains a bacterial origin of replication and the amp resistance gene. Furthermore it contains the yeast *TRP1* gene for transformation selection in *S. cerevisiae*. It is designed for high protein expression in yeast and therefore has the 2μ origin of replication ensuring high copy numbers in *S.cerevisiae*. In addition, it contains the strong constitutive actin promoter and the *GAL11* transcriptional termination sequence separated by a multiple cloning site containing restriction sites for *NcoI* (covering translational initiation codon ATG), *ApaI*, *StuI*, three translational stop codons in all three frames and a *SalI* site.

All scFv fragments were cloned via *Bsp120I* and *StuI* restriction sites and carried a C-terminal His<sub>5</sub>-tag. Two amino acids (Gly-Pro) encoding the *Bsp120I* site

had to be included at the N-terminus, after the initiating Met residue.

5 **Fusion of the Gal4 AD N-terminal to the various antibody variants.**

The Gal4 activation domain was amplified by polymerase chain reaction using pGAD424 (Clontech) as template. Both primers (upstream primer:

10 5'-CCATGGGCCAAGCTTGCAAAGATGGATAAAG-3', downstream primer:

5'-TTTGGGCCGAAGAACGCCACCAGAACCGCCTCCACCAGAGCCACCACCA  
CCAGGCCTGATCTCTTTGGTTGGTG-3') contain an *Apa*I site suitable for cloning the Gal4 activation domain (AD) polypeptide including the SV40 T-antigen nuclear localisation signal N-terminal to the different scFv's in the context of pESBA Act. The activation domain and the single chain antibodies are separated by a (GGGS)<sub>3</sub> linker encoded by the downstream primer.

20 **LexA fusion**

The GCN4 leucine zipper (aa 245-285) was PCR amplified with primers containing an *Eco*RI site convenient for cloning downstream of LexA aa 1-202. This results in pAdM018, an *Ars Cen* plasmid with the LEU2 selection marker expressing the fusion protein under the control of the ADH promoter.

30 **Introduction of a *Bgl*II and *Xho*I site flanking CDR3 of  $V_H$**

In order to easily exchange the CDR3 of the variable heavy chain, two unique restriction sites were introduced flanking the CDR3  $V_H$  by site directed mutagenesis, without changing the primary structure of the Gal4 AD- $\lambda$ -graft scFv. These silent point mutations were introduced by PCR using  $\lambda$ -graft as template. In a first round, two separate PCR reactions were performed using primer #2421 with #2487 and #2486 with #2488 leading to

two overlapping PCR products. These two products served as template for the second round of PCR with the outer primer #2421 and #2488 containing a *SpeI* and *SalI* site. The final product was subcloned into Gal4 AD- $\lambda$ -graft using *SpeI* and *SalI*.

**5** **Direct intracellular screening for novel CDRs interacting with the antigen.**

The first three amino acids (GLF) of the CDR3 from the variable heavy chain of the framework stabilized  $\lambda$ -graft scFv fused to the Gal4 activation domain ( $\lambda$ -graft scFv-Gal4 AD) were randomized with a PCR based method described by Reiter et al. The last two residues (D and Y) of the CDR3 were not randomized due to their conservation and structural importance (Chothia and Lesk, 1987). A  $\lambda$ -graft scFv-Gal4 AD library potentially encoding 8000 different CDR3 variants of the variable heavy chain was obtained. Sequence analysis of six randomly picked library clones revealed the presence of random CDR3 sequences at 20 the expected positions.

The yeast strain YDE173, containing the *HIS3* and *LacZ* reporter genes under the control of 6 LexA binding sites (see above), was cotransformed with the vector expressing the GCN4 leucine zipper (aa 245-285) fused to LexA and the library and plated on selective drop out plates (-Trp/ -Leu/ -His) containing 60 mM 3-AT for growth selection. If a scFv fragment from the CDR3 library with a suitable CDR3 sequence binds to the leucine zipper antigen fused to LexA, a complex is formed that activates transcription of the *HIS3* reporter gene and restores histidine independent growth of the yeast cell. After 3 days, growing colonies were picked and replated on the same selective drop out plates. Cells that still grew after the second selection were analyzed for  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity on X-gal plates. Library plasmid DNA from  $\beta$ -gal positive clones was extracted and the region of the CDR3 of the variable heavy chain was se-

quenced: We found four times the original  $\lambda$ -graft CDR3 amino acid sequence and 3 completely new CDR3 sequences specific for the GCN4 leucine zipper. The four identified scFv clones containing the original CDR3 sequence behaved 5 indistinguishable as the  $\lambda$ -graft whereas the three clones with the altered CDR3 sequence were less efficient in activating the LacZ reporter gene.

These results demonstrate the feasibility of a direct intracellular screening for novel CDRs embedded 10 in a defined scFv framework that is stable and soluble under reducing conditions.

**In vivo performance of a defined intrabody can be optimized by random mutagenesis**

15 The framework stabilized  $\lambda$ -graft variant was randomly mutagenized by PCR as described by Sambrook et al. in order to statistically introduce amino acid changes along the framework of the intrabody. The yeast strain YDE173 was cotransformed with this random mutagenized scFv library fused to the activation domain of 20 Gal4 and the plasmid expressing the specific antigen (aa 245-258 of the GCN4 leucine zipper) fused to LexA and grown on drop out plates containing 80 mM 3-AT. Six candidate clones were selected, each bearing one single 25 amino acid change in the framework. All these six mutant frameworks showed an improved in vivo performance compared to the  $\lambda$ -graft variant, which was confirmed and quantitated by measuring the  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity. With the assumption that different amino acid changes 30 which improve the performance of an intrabody behave additively, we combined all six mutations in one framework which was fused to the Gal4 activation domain and compared it with the framework stabilized  $\lambda$ -graft variant in activating the LacZ reporter gene. Figure 2 shows that 35 this new framework which has all six point mutations combined ( $\Omega$ -graft) displays an almost 30% better in vivo performance compared to the original  $\lambda$ -graft variant. Re-

markably, these six amino acid substitutions are clustered; two of them (E→K and L→R are preceding the CDR1 of the variable light chain and the remaining four (N→D, G→C, K→E, T→S) are located between CDR2 and CDR3 of the 5 variable heavy chain.

Integration of a reporter gene into the chromosome of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*

10 The integrating reporter plasmid pAB183 was derived from pJP161 (Barberis et al., 1995) by cloning two Gcn4p binding sites at position 150 upstream of the TATA box of the GAL1 promoter. The Gcn4p binding sites were generated by annealing two complementary oligonucleotides having a 5' *Sph*I and 3' *Sal*II compatible overhang sequence. The oligonucleotides are as follows:

15 5'-CCTATGACTCATCCAGTTATGACTCATCG-3';  
5' TCGACGATGAGTCATAACTGGAT GAGTCATAGGCATG-3'. This reporter plasmid was linearized at the *Apal* site and integrated into the yeast genomic *ura3* locus of strain JPY5 (Barberis et al., 1995), resulting in YAdM2xGCN4-150. Strain YAdM2xGCN4-150 was deposited on February 11, 2000 20 with the Deutsche Sammlung von Mikroorganismen und Zellkulturen GmbH DSZM, Braunschweig Germany, with the Number DSM13332. Four independent yeast transformants were 25 tested in a functional assay and all showed the same GCN4-dependent reporter gene activity. One of the clones (YAdM2xGCN4-150) was chosen for all subsequent experiments and is called yeast wild-type.

30 The reporter strain used for the two hybrid experiments, has a integrated reporter construct containing a bidirectional promoter with six LexA binding sites driving LacZ and HIS3 expression.

35 **Serial dilution and spotting of yeast cells**  
Yeast cells were transformed using the lithium acetate method, following standard protocols. Trans-

formants were grown over night at 30°C in drop-out medium (-Trp/-Leu). The saturated cultures were diluted in drop-out medium to OD<sub>600</sub> = 0.7 and incubated again for at least one duplication time. Each culture was serially diluted 5 in water (dilution factor 5) starting with an approximate concentration of 10<sup>6</sup> cells/ml, and 10 µl of each dilution were spotted on drop-out plates (-Trp/-Leu/-His) containing 0 mM, 20 mM, 40 mM, 60 mM, 80 mM, or 100 mM of 3-aminotriazole. Six different dilutions of each transformant were spotted on drop-out plates. The plates were incubated at 30°C and scanned after 48h, 72h, and 120h.

15 *In vivo analysis of scFv fragments: Expression of scFv fragments in yeast and the β-galactosidase reporter assay*

The β-galactosidase assay in solution was performed using permeabilized cells as described (Kaiser et al., 1994, Escher and Schaffner 1997). Activity was normalized to the number of cells assayed.

20

*Western blot analysis of anti-GCN4 scFv fragments*

The solubility of the different anti-GCN4 25 scFv fragments was analyzed by Western blot. Five ml cultures were grown at 30°C to an optical density of about 2-3. Cells were normalized to same cell densities, pelleted and whole cell protein was extracted with Y-PER™ Yeast Protein Extraction Reagent form Pierce, which is a 30 mild detergent formulation facilitating gentle isolation of soluble proteins. Soluble and insoluble fractions were separated by centrifugation (13000 rpm, 10 min, 4°C). Samples of soluble and insoluble crude extract were subjected to SDS-PAGE and blotted on PVDF membranes, following 35 standard protocols. His<sub>5</sub>-tagged scFv fragments were detected with anti-His<sub>5</sub> scFv-AP fusion as described (Lindner et al., 1997), with the chemoluminescent phos-

phatase substrate CSPD from Boehringer Mannheim. To obtain reasonable intensities on the Western blots, about 5 times higher protein concentrations had to be used in the soluble fractions, compared with the insoluble fractions 5 and the blots were exposed for different time spans. Thus, a direct comparison is only meaningful between all soluble or all insoluble samples, respectively.

While there are shown and described presently preferred embodiments of the invention, it is to be distinctly understood that the invention is not limited thereto but may be otherwise variously embodied and practiced within the scope of the following claims. 10

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Claims

1. A method for the isolation of an scFv with defined framework that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment, wherein
  - 5 a) a scFv library with varied frameworks and constant CDRs is generated by mutation of at least one framework encoding region of DNA sequence of a scFv to a known antigen and by introduction of such mutations into
  - 10 suitable expression vectors,
  - b) host cells able to express a specific known antigen and only surviving in the presence of antigen-scFv-interaction are transformed with said scFv library,
  - 15 c) the thus transformed host cells are cultivated under conditions suitable to express the antigen and the scFv and allowing cell survival only in the presence of antigen-scFv-interaction,
  - d) the scFv expressed in surviving cells and
  - 20 having a defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment is isolated.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the host cell is an eukaryotic cell.
3. The method of claim 1 or 2 wherein the host cell is a yeast cell.
4. A scFv with defined framework, obtainable by the method of one of claims 1 to 3.
5. The scFv of claim 4 comprising restriction sites allowing the selective exchanging of at least one
- 30 CDR.
6. The scFv of claim 5, wherein the restriction sites are located within the framework flanking a CDR.
7. A method for the generation of a scFv encoding DNA with a framework suitable for selective alterations in the CDR region, wherein specific restriction sites are introduced into the sequence of a defined, sta-

ble and soluble scFv encoding DNA by means of site directed mutagenesis.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the restriction sites are located within the framework and 5 whereby the substitution of the nucleotides to generate the restriction site does not affect the amino acid sequence.

9. A method for the generation of a scFv with defined framework that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment, wherein at least two variations of at 10 least two different frameworks that are stable and soluble in a reducing environment, preferably frameworks of one of claims 4-6 or frameworks isolated according to one of claims 1-3 are combined to produce a scFv with defined 15 framework.

10. A scFv with defined framework, obtainable by the method of claim 9.

11. The scFv of claim 10 wherein the variations are preceding the CDR1 of the variable light chain.

20 12. The scFv of claim 10 wherein the variations are located between CDR2 and CDR3 of the variable heavy chain.

25 13. The scFv of claim 10 wherein at least one variation is preceding the CDR1 and at least one variation is located between CDR2 and CDR3 of the variable heavy chain.

30 14. The scFv of claim 10 wherein at least 2 variations are preceding CDR1 and at least 2, preferably at least 4 variations are located between CDR2 and CDR3 of the variable heavy chain.

15. A scFv comprising the framework defined in SEQ ID NO 1.

35 16. A method for the generation of a CDR library with a defined framework, that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment, wherein DNA sequences encoding a scFv of one of the previous claims are digested

to replace at least one CDR per sequence by a modified CDR.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the modified CDR is generated by random changes.

5 18. A library of intrabodies with at least one randomized CDR and defined framework that is stable and soluble under reductive conditions.

10 19. A method for screening for CDRs interacting with a specific antigen, wherein host cells transformed with a nucleic acid sequence, in particular a DNA sequence, encoding a known antigen are further transformed with a randomized CDR library with defined framework that is stable and soluble in a reducing environment, whereby the antigen and/or the scFv are linked to a 15 marker system or part of a marker system thus that the cell cultured under selective conditions only survives in the presence of antigen/scFv-interaction, that thus transformed cells are cultivated under selective conditions, and that surviving cells are cultured and the intrabodies harvested.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the framework is a framework as defined in one of the preceding claims.

25 21. The method of claim 19 or 20, wherein the cell is an eukaryotic cell, in particular a yeast cell.

22. The method of one of claims 19 to 21 wherein the DNA sequence encoding the antigen and the DNA sequence encoding the scFv both encode chimeric molecules with the antigen or scFv, respectively, both linked to 30 part of a transcription activating system linked to a survival allowing marker.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the antigen is fused to a DNA binding domain and the scFv is fused to a transcriptional activator domain or the antigen is fused to a transcriptional activator domain and 35 the scFv is fused to a DNA binding domain.

24. A method for screening for an antigen interacting with an scFv, wherein host cells expressing at least one antigen of interest are transformed with at least one scFv with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, or with a randomized CDR library with defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment, whereby the antigens and/or the scFvs are linked to a marker system or part of a marker system thus that the cell cultured under selective conditions only survives in the presence of antigen/scFv-interaction, that thus transformed cells are cultivated under selective conditions, and that surviving cells are cultured and the scFvs harvested.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the framework is a framework as defined in one of the preceding claims.

26. The method of claim 24 or 25, wherein the cell is an eukaryotic cell, in particular a yeast cell.

27. The method of one of claims 24 to 26, wherein the DNA sequence encoding the antigen and the DNA sequence encoding the scFv both encode chimeric molecules with the antigen or scFv, respectively, both linked to part of a transcription activating system linked to a survival allowing marker.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein the antigen is fused to a DNA binding domain and the scFv is fused to a transcriptional activator domain or the antigen is fused to a transcriptional activator domain and the scFv is fused to a DNA binding domain.

29. An scFv with defined framework as therapeutic or diagnostic or prophylactic agent.

30. Use of the scFv with defined framework for intracellular screenings.

31. A method for testing/evaluating a scFv library or any CDR library wherein host cells transformed with a DNA sequence encoding an intrabody directed against a constant region of the library are further

transformed with DNA sequences encoding said library whereby the intrabody and the library are linked to a marker system or part of a marker system thus that the cultured cells under selective conditions only survive in 5 the presence of intrabody-library interaction and that said cells are cultured under selective conditions.

32. The method of claim 31 wherein the DNA sequence encoding the intrabody and the DNA sequence encoding the library both encode chimeric molecules with 10 the intrabody or the library, respectively, both linked to part of a transcription activating system linked to a survival allowing marker.

33. The method of claim 32, wherein the intrabody is fused to a DNA binding domain and the library 15 is fused to a transcriptional activator domain or the intrabody is fused to a transcriptional activator domain and the library is fused to a DNA binding domain.

34. The method of one of claims 31-33 wherein the library is a scFv library.

20 35. The method of one of claims 31-33 wherein the library is a CDR library.

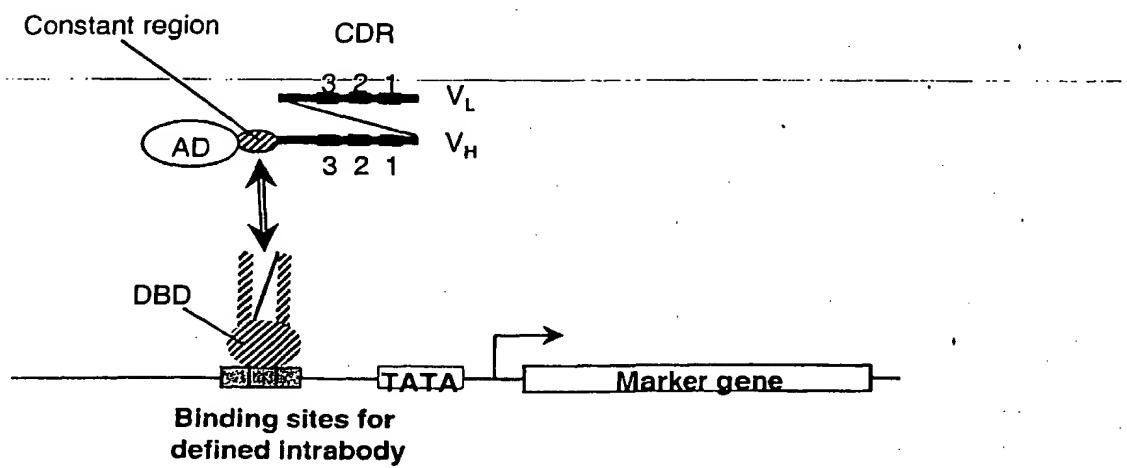
36. The method of claim 35 wherein the library is a library according to the present invention.

25 37. A scFv with defined framework obtainable by the method of one of claims 31-34, in particular for the use in the method of claim 1.

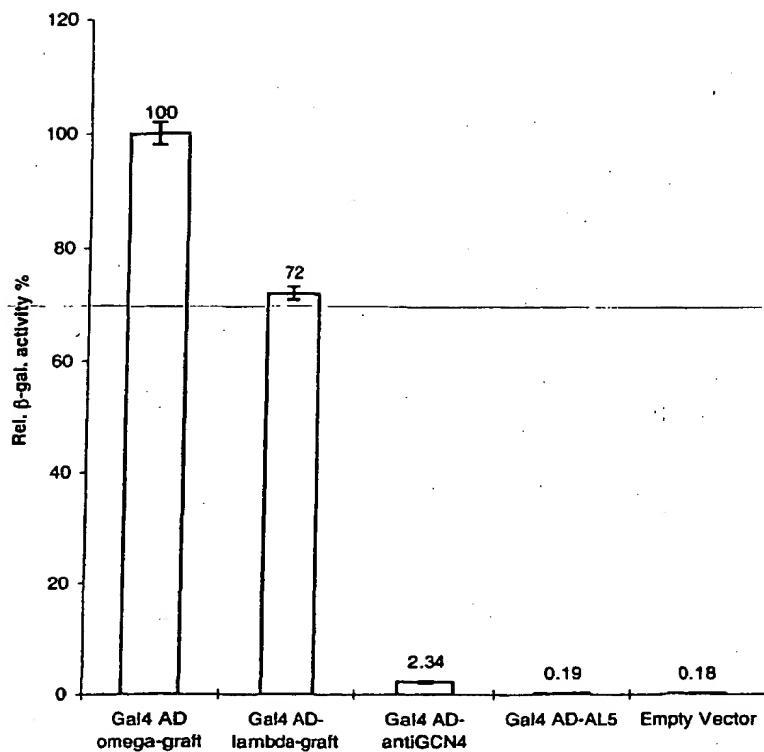
Abstract

A method for the isolation of CDRs in a defined framework that is stable and soluble in reducing environment is described as well as thus obtainable scFv. Starting from such scFv with defined framework a scFv library can be generated wherein the framework is conserved while at least one complementary determining region (CDR) is randomized. Such library, e.g. in yeast cells, is suitable for screening for antibody/CDR-interactions or for screening for antibodies.

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**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

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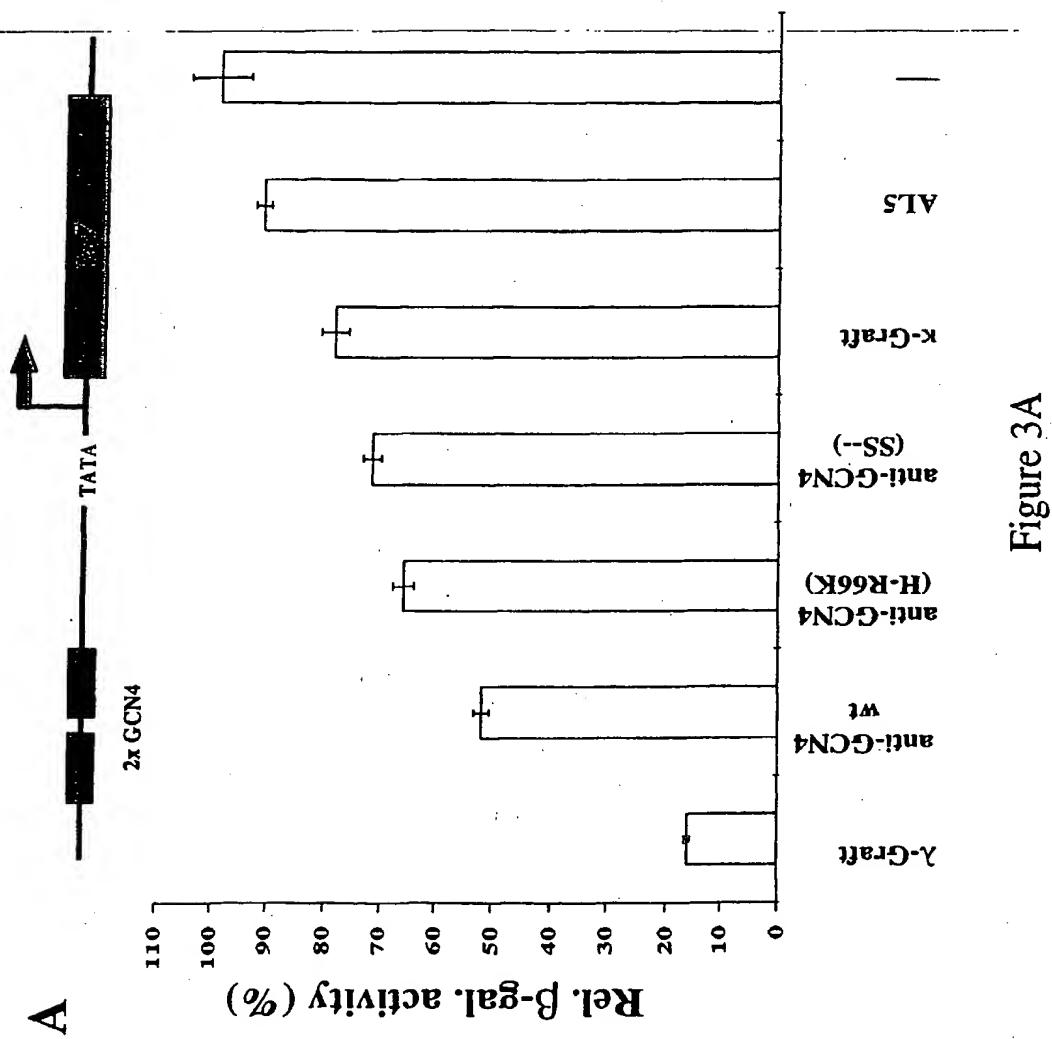


Figure 3A

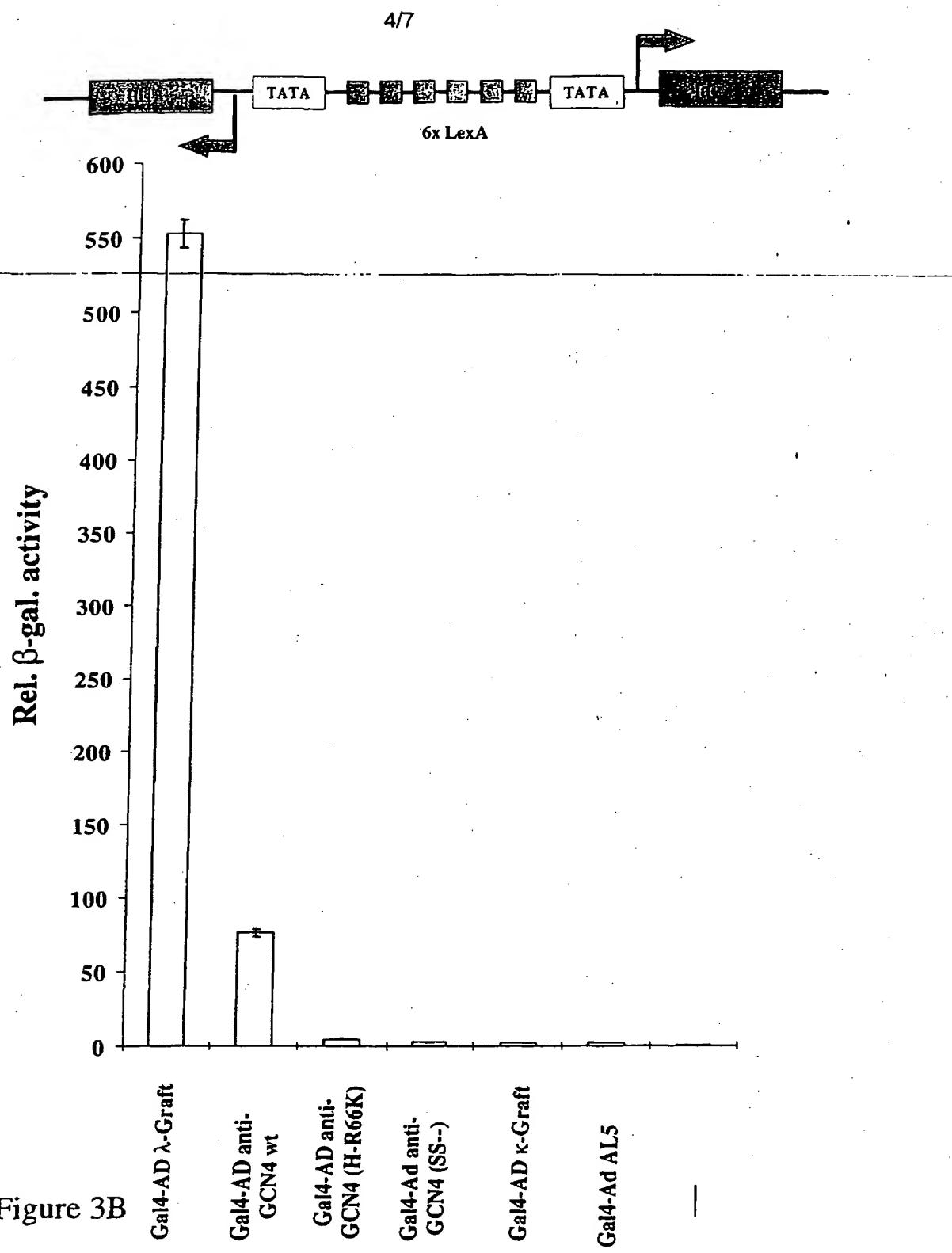


Figure 3B

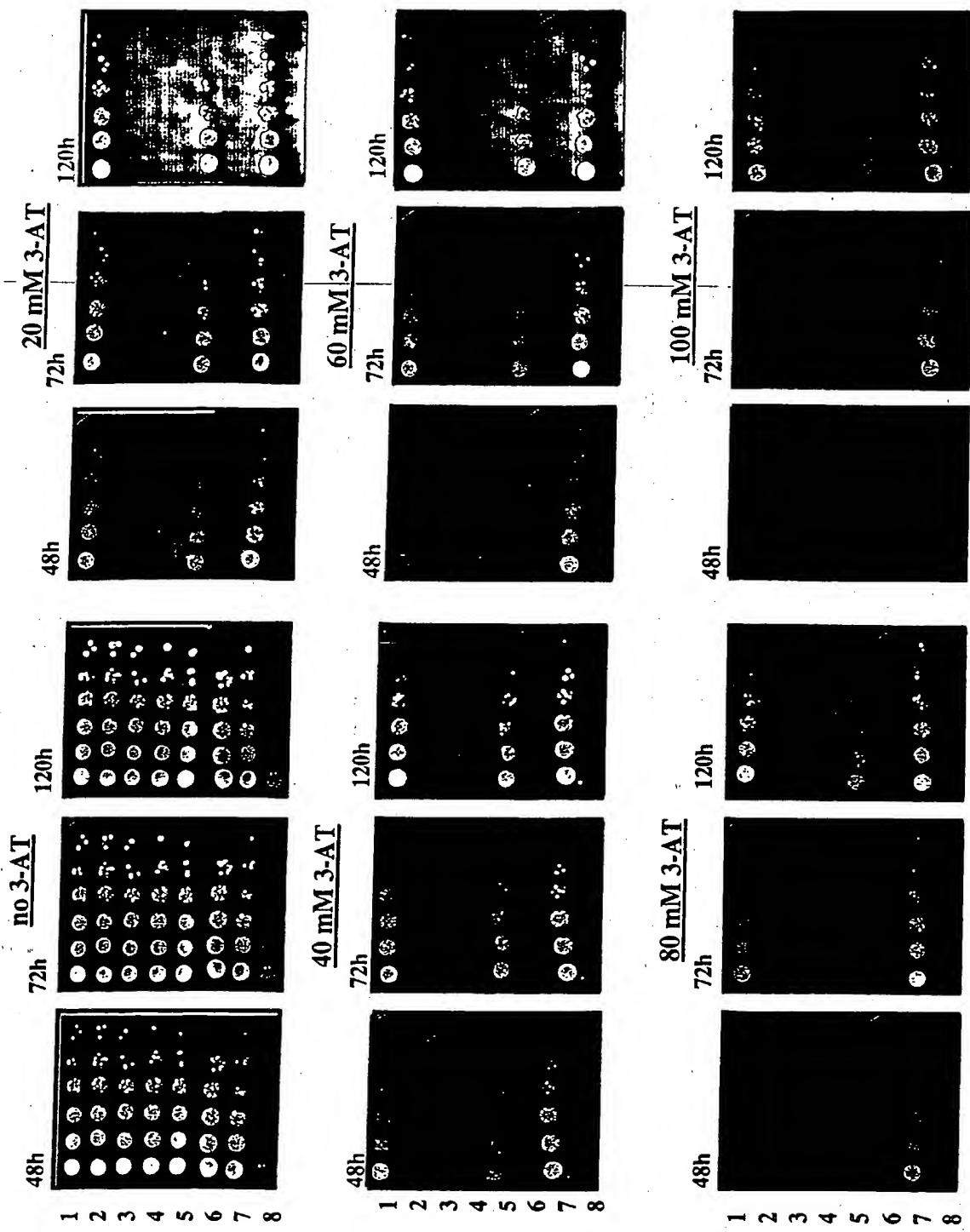


Figure 4

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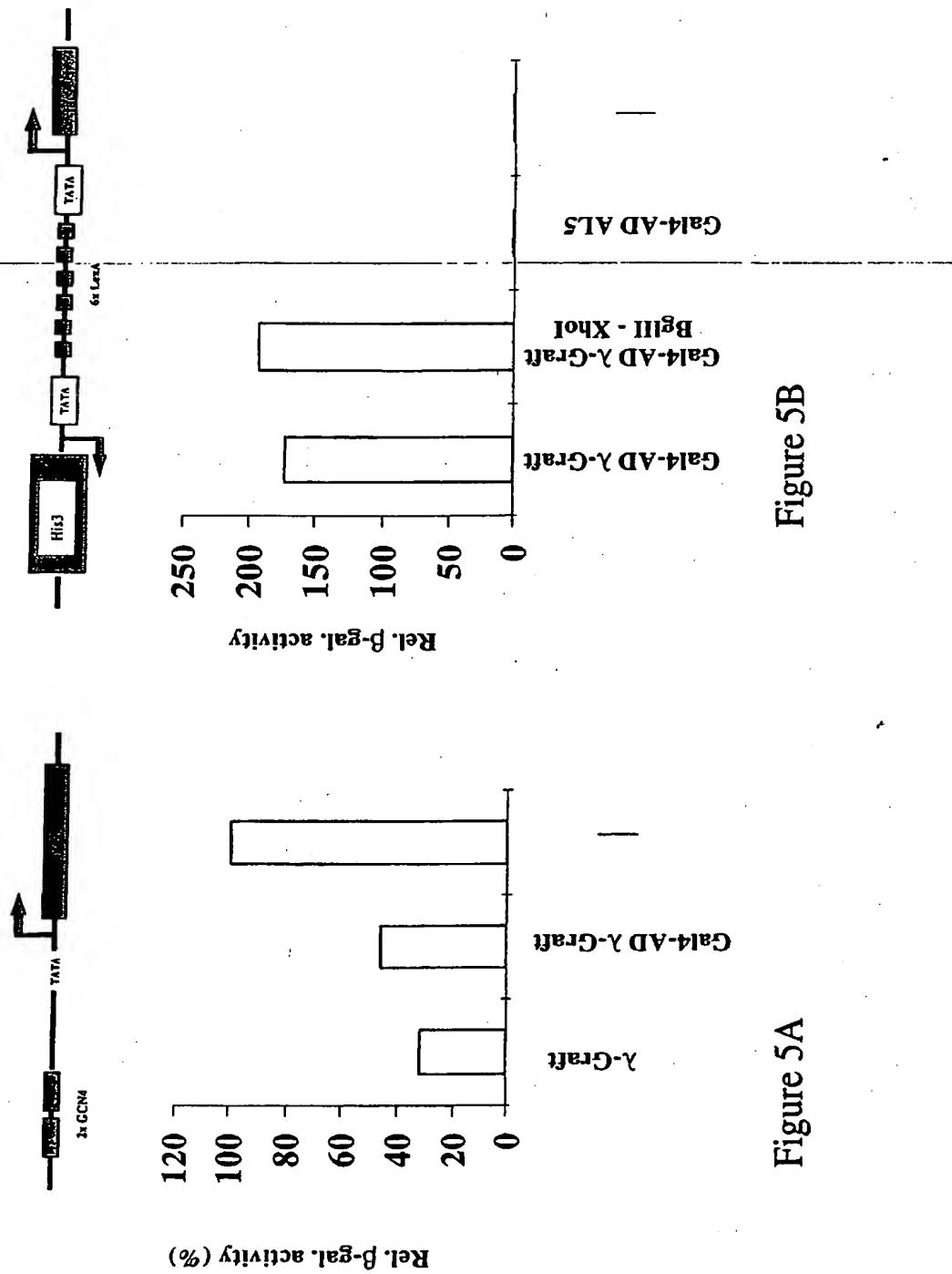


Figure 5B

Figure 5A

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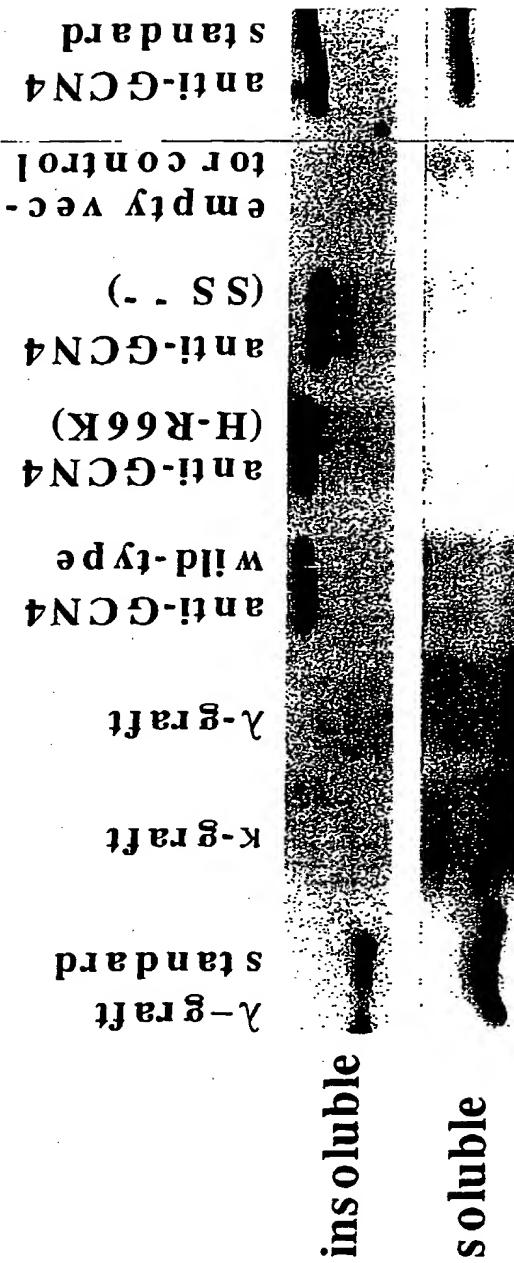


Figure 6

SEQUENCE LISTING

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Val Thr Thr Ser Asn Tyr Ala Ser Trp Val Gln Lys Lys Pro Gly Lys  
 35 40 45

Arg Phe Lys Gly Leu Ile Gly Gly Thr Asn Asn Arg Ala Pro Gly Val  
 50 55 60

Pro Ser Arg Phe Ser Gly Ser Leu Ile Gly Asp Lys Ala Thr Leu Thr  
 65 70 75 80

Ile Ser Ser Leu Gln Pro Glu Asp Phe Ala Thr Tyr Phe Cys Ala Leu  
 85 90 95

Trp Tyr Ser Asn His Trp Val Phe Gly Gln Gly Thr Lys Val Glu Leu  
 100 105 110

Lys Arg Gly Gly Gly Ser Gly Gly Gly Ser Gly Gly Gly Gly  
 115 120 125

Ser Ser Gly Gly Ser Glu Val Lys Leu Leu Glu Ser Gly Gly  
130 135 140

Leu Val Gln Pro Gly Gly Ser Leu Lys Leu Ser Cys Ala Val Ser Gly  
145 150 155 160

Phe Ser Leu Thr Asp Tyr Gly Val Asn Trp Val Arg Gln Ala Pro Gly  
165 170 175

Arg Gly Leu Glu Trp Ile Gly Val Ile Trp Gly Asp Gly Ile Thr Asp  
180 185 190

Tyr Asn Ser Ala Leu Lys Asp Arg Phe Ile Ile Ser Lys Asp Asp Cys  
195 200 205

Glu Asn Ser Val Tyr Leu Gln Met Ser Lys Val Arg Ser Asp Asp Thr  
210 215 220

Ala Leu Tyr Tyr Cys Val Thr Gly Leu Phe Asp Tyr Trp Gly Gln Gly  
225 230 235 240

Thr Leu Val Thr Val Ser Ser His His His His His  
245 250